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ABSTRACT

Multiunit school organization increases teacher participation in making decisions that directly affect them through decentralized decisionmaking -- a shift from individual to group decisions. A survey of teachers revealed that those in multiunit schools were more satisfied with their profession than were those in traditionally organized schools, primarily because group participation in decisionmaking increased their effectiveness as teachers and the power to affect decisions underscored their professionalism. A related document is EA 003 477. (RA)

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Professional Satisfaction and Decision Making in the Multiunit Schools

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INTRODUCTION

This paper deals primarily with professional satisfaction and decision making in the multiunit school. Before turning attention to these topics, however, we would like to explain briefly why the research on which these remarks are based was conducted and to outline the nature and scope of the study.

In the Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration at the University of Oregon, we are giving considerable attention to innovations in education. We are especially interested in studying those few instances in American education in which innovation includes a deliberate effort to make significant changes in the organization of the school. In analyzing such cases, we believe we can learn what organizational elements or dimensions are critical variables when planned changes are introduced. More importantly, we are hopeful that we can discover what kinds of organizational changes can actually make effective implementation of innovations possible.

The organizational changes introduced by multiunit schools are among the most extensive known to us. Changes include the replacement of conventional grades by units, team teaching, the use of instructional and clerical aides, and the introduction of the new position of unit leader. It is also true that these changes in organization are accompanied by a host of other innovations--e.g., individually guided education, the provision of enriched and flexible curriculum materials, and an emphasis on planning, identification of objectives, and evaluation. For us, the discovery of organizational changes--planned and unplanned--that accompany such innovations in multiunit schools is an important research goal that may have significant implications for educational development.

Let us provide a brief description of the research that was conducted. Our data was gathered during the spring of 1968, at a time when multiunit organization had not evolved to its present point. Six schools make up our study population: three are multiunit schools and three are control schools. The latter are located in the same communities as the multiunit schools. In reporting our findings, the schools will not be identified by name.

In each community we distributed questionnaires to all available professional personnel in the two schools and to central-office personnel whose work relates closely to the program of the elementary schools. These questionnaires were extremely detailed and extensive, covering a variety of matters pertaining to the characteristics of the schools and to the behavior, attitudes, and goals of the respondents themselves. On the average, the questionnaire took 1-1/2 hours to complete.

In addition to gathering data by questionnaires, we interviewed a majority of the persons who answered the questionnaires. The principal, the unit leaders, half of the teachers, and two nonprofessionals were interviewed in each multiunit school. Although the questionnaires did not mention multiunit schools, the interviews dealt mainly with matters pertaining to the multiunit program.

We will first report our basic findings concerning professional satisfaction in the multiunit and control schools. Following this we will mention briefly some factors in the multiunit schools that may be related to job satisfaction. We will then focus attention on decision-making processes, which we believe to be a key factor in determining professional satisfaction. We shall conclude with an interpretive statement on the relationship between job satisfaction and the decision-making structure of the school.

PROFESSIONAL SATISFACTION

Our data on professional satisfaction are derived from a ten-item job satisfaction scale. We shall begin by summarizing the data on job satisfaction for classroom teachers; unit leaders will be mentioned separately.

For three items on the ten-item job satisfaction scale, the proportions of teachers reporting that they were "highly satisfied" were similar in the two sets of schools. A comparison of the other seven items reveals consistent differences, all in favor of the multiunit schools.

The seven items, together with the proportions responding "highly satisfied" in multiunit and control schools, are as follows:

1. Satisfaction with progress toward one's personal goals in present position, 29 per cent and 16 per cent;

2. Satisfaction with personal relationships with administrators and supervisors, 56 per cent and 44 per cent;

3. Opportunity to accept responsibility for one's own work or the work of others, 58 per cent and 47 per cent;

4. Seeing positive results from one's efforts, 39 per cent and 15 per cent;

5. Personal relationships with fellow teachers, 72 per cent and 57 per cent;

6. Satisfaction with present job in light of one's career expectations, 54 per cent and 42 per cent;

7. The availability of pertinent instructional materials and aids, 58 per cent and 32 per cent.

There were, of course, variations from school to school in responses to individual items in the job satisfaction scale. For the three pairs of schools, twenty-one comparisons of the seven items we have mentioned are possible. In fourteen of the twenty-one cases, the percentages reporting that they were highly satisfied were greater in the multiunit schools; in two instances, the percentages were about the same (within two percentage points); and in five comparisons, the differences favored the control schools.

The unit leaders reported higher satisfaction than the multiunit teachers on seven of the ten items. If we had included the unit leaders among the multiunit teachers, which would be reasonable because the primary job of the unit leader is teaching, the differences between multiunit and control schools would have been somewhat greater than reported above.

In our interviews with teachers, we often heard the multiunit school described as an exciting and interesting place to work because of its emphasis on new ideas and experimentation. Our interview data alone, however, do not allow

us to make comparisons of professional satisfaction between multiunit and control schools. As far as we can determine, the control schools are excellent institutions where professional satisfaction is high in comparison with other schools known to us.

If one seeks to explain the high rate of satisfaction in the multiunit schools, several factors might be mentioned. While these factors merit detailed discussion, I shall but mention them briefly because of time limitations.

1. In the multiunit school the teacher does not work in relative isolation. Rather, he is part of a group endeavor, a member of a work team in which close ties of cooperation and mutual aid exist among members. For many, this is a highly satisfying work environment.

2. Our analysis of job descriptions prepared by respondents reveals that the nature of the teaching job is somewhat different in the multiunit school. To a greater extent than in the control schools, the duties of the multiunit teacher are concentrated in teaching, planning, and preparing for instruction. Two reasons for this concentration are apparent: (a) instructional and clerical aides relieve the teacher of much routine work; and (b) there is an economy of effort in that a variety of nonteaching tasks performed by all teachers in a conventional school can be carried out by one person for his entire unit in the multiunit school.

3. We also asked a series of questions designed to solicit teacher perceptions of the extent of freedom and rigidity in school policies. Responses to these items provide evidence that teachers in multiunit schools perceive their environment as being more free, less rigid, and more open to experimentation than do the teachers in the control schools.

4. Various forms of specialization are emerging in the multiunit school. These specializations not only make it possible for teachers to select duties according to their interests and talents, but they contribute to heightened effectiveness of the unit.

5. The unit leader plays a highly facilitative role. As a member of the work group, he is readily available to provide assistance, advice, and consultation.

6. It is also possible that the work environment of the multiunit school is so new and novel that a "Hawthorne Effect" has developed which exercises a positive influence on job satisfaction in the short run.

7. Finally, it is quite likely that revisions in the patterns of authority and decision-making processes in the multiunit school contribute to job satisfaction. We shall now explore this matter in some detail.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

In examining decision making in the multiunit schools and their controls, we shall first give attention to the location of decision-making prerogatives. Then an analysis of the influence and prestige structures of the schools will be presented.

Considerable attention was given in our research to the identification of decision makers involved in specific decisions at the classroom and school levels. In a series of questions we asked each teacher to indicate the role he plays in the decision-making process with regard to the following five activities:

1. Choosing teaching methods used in the classroom
2. Determining the scope and sequence of subject matter content
3. Selecting instructional materials other than textbooks
4. Deciding on pupil promotion
5. Scheduling daily classroom activities

For each of the five decisions the respondent was asked to indicate if he had:

a. Complete autonomy to make the decision himself

b. Final authority to make the decision after receiving suggestions and recommendations from others

c. Authority to make the decision within certain limits

d. Authority to share the decision with other persons in a group or committee

e. No voice in making the decision (i.e., the decision is made by others)

When the respondent chose any but the first alternative, he was asked to identify the other persons involved in the decision-making process and the positions they occupied. In addition, we asked respondents to identify the "limits" when response "c" was chosen.

Let us examine the distributions of faculty responses to the questions on decision-making prerogatives in the five activity areas. Tables 1-6 give percentage distribution of responses to each of the five questions. Table 6 summarizes responses to all five questions. In these tables, School D is the control school for School A, School E for School B, and School F for School C.

If we look at table 1, which deals with the choice of teaching methods used in the classroom, we note first that response "a", indicating complete respondent autonomy in making the decision, is selected by a lower percentage of multiunit faculty members than faculty members in the control schools in two of the three sets of schools. The choice of response "b", indicating that the respondent has final authority to make the

decision after receiving suggestions and recommendations from others, is much less frequent in two of the multiunit schools than in their controls. The choice of response "c", indicating that the respondent has authority to make the decision within certain limits, is more frequent in two of the multiunit schools.

It is when we note choices of response "d", however, that we begin to observe basic differences between the two sets of schools. This response, which indicates that the faculty member has authority to share the decision with other persons in a group or committee, is selected by a large proportion of the respondents in each multiunit school, but not by a single person in the control schools. For this decision-making activity, no one in any school chose response "e", which would indicate that the respondent has no voice in making the decision.

With regard to the scope and sequence of subject matter content (table 2), we note few choices of response "a". Responses "c" and "b" are most often selected by control school teachers, while teachers in the multiunit schools are concentrated in response "d". There is less variation among multiunit responses than in table 1.

The general pattern of responses is fairly well set in these first two tables. In table 3 responses are concentrated in "d" and "b" in the multiunit schools, and "c" and "b" in the controls. Table 4 shows response "d" as dominant in the multiunit schools, while this response is chosen by no faculty members in the control schools. Rather, their responses are overwhelmingly in "b" and "c". In table 5 there is even greater concentration in response "d" in the multiunit schools. Again this response is selected by no one in the control schools: choice "c" is the most frequent and there are no selections at all of "d" and "e".

If we examine table 6, which summarizes answers to all five questions, we clearly see the overall pattern. Response "a" is chosen by less than half as many multiunit as control school faculty members. The same is true for response "b". Almost 2-1/2 times as many faculty members in the control schools select response "c". On the other hand, response "d" is chosen almost ten times more often in the multiunit schools. Response "e" is not often chosen in either set of schools, but somewhat more frequently in the multiunit schools.

Let us now combine the findings in these tables with other data obtained in replies to the same questions. As said earlier, when the individual selected responses "b", "c", "d", or "e", he was asked to name the other persons involved and the positions they occupied. In addition, when response "c" was chosen, we asked that the limits to respondent autonomy be stated. Our analysis of these questions, together with the data in tables 1-6, makes it possible to state some generalizations about the decision-making process in each set of schools.

In the control schools, there is some variation in responses for the five types of decisions. Nonetheless, we can identify the basic decision-making process that prevails. In most instances, the individual teacher makes the decisions, either alone, in consultation with the principal, or within certain limits prescribed and/or enforced by him. The teacher and the principal operate within certain limits or guidelines set by the district curriculum committee and by central office subject matter specialists. Thus both primary decision-makers--the teacher and the principal--have limits set on their discretionary authority.

On the other hand, few teachers see themselves as involved in group decision-making of any kind. Our data give us a view of the school as being composed of separate, relatively isolated classrooms, with the activities of each being determined primarily by the teacher monitored to a greater or lesser extent by the principal. For the school as a whole, the principal is the central authority figure; he is the only person whose basic activities extend beyond the borders of a single classroom.

In the multiunit school there are some remnants of the pattern we have just described. The key fact is, however, that the decision-making process has been fundamentally altered. The evidence is overwhelming that decision-making authority has been shifted to the unit faculty. When responses "b", "c", "d", and "e" are chosen in replies to the questions covered

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FACULTY RESPONSES TO QUESTION DEALING WITH CHOICE OF TEACHING METHODS USED IN THE CLASSROOM

Responses*	Multiunit Schools			Control Schools			All Multiunit Schools	All Control Schools
	A	B	C	D	E	F		
a	10.5	0.0	7.7	41.2	20.0	7.1	6.9	23.9
b	52.6	23.1	26.9	47.0	73.3	92.9	34.5	69.6
c	5.3	7.7	19.2	11.0	6.7	0.0	12.1	6.5
d	31.6	69.2	46.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	46.5	0.0
e	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FACULTY RESPONSES TO QUESTION DEALING WITH SCOPE AND SEQUENCE OF SUBJECT MATTER CONTENT

Responses*	Multiunit Schools			Control Schools			All Multiunit Schools	All Control Schools
	A	B	C	D	E	F		
a	0.0	14.3	0.0	0.0	6.2	0.0	3.4	2.1
b	15.8	14.3	19.2	11.8	68.8	33.3	17.0	37.5
c	21.1	14.3	23.1	41.1	18.8	60.0	20.3	39.6
d	57.8	57.1	50.0	35.3	0.0	6.7	54.2	14.6
e	5.3	0.0	7.7	11.8	6.2	0.0	5.1	6.2

*Legend:

a = Respondent has complete autonomy to make the decision himself.

b = Respondent has final authority to make the decision after receiving suggestions and recommendations from others.

c = Respondent has authority to make the decision within certain limits.

d = Respondent has authority to share the decision with other persons in a group or committee.

e = Respondent has no voice in making the decision (i.e., the decision is made by others).

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FACULTY RESPONSES TO QUESTION DEALING WITH CHOICE OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS OTHER THAN TEXTBOOKS

Responses*	Multiunit Schools			Control Schools			All Multiunit Schools	All Control Schools
	A	B	C	D	E	F		
a	0.0	21.4	3.8	12.5	0.0	6.2	6.8	6.2
b	36.8	64.3	19.2	12.5	62.5	18.8	35.5	31.3
c	10.5	0.0	23.1	25.0	31.3	56.3	13.6	37.5
d	52.7	14.3	46.2	25.0	6.2	6.2	40.7	12.5
e	0.0	0.0	7.7	25.0	0.0	12.5	3.4	12.5

TABLE 4

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FACULTY RESPONSES TO QUESTION DEALING WITH PUPIL PROMOTION

Responses*	Multiunit Schools			Control Schools			All Multiunit Schools	All Control Schools
	A	B	C	D	E	F		
a	5.3	8.4	0.0	5.9	0.0	17.6	3.5	7.8
b	26.3	0.0	23.1	58.8	64.7	47.1	19.3	56.9
c	15.8	8.4	15.4	23.5	35.3	35.3	14.0	31.4
d	47.3	58.2	53.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	52.7	0.0
e	5.3	25.0	7.7	11.8	0.0	0.0	10.5	3.9

*Legend:

a = Respondent has complete autonomy to make the decision himself.
b = Respondent has final authority to make the decision after receiving suggestions and recommendations from others.
c = Respondent has authority to make the decision within certain limits.
d = Respondent has authority to share the decision with other persons in a group or committee.
e = Respondent has no voice in making the decision (i.e., the decision is made by others).

TABLE 5

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FACULTY RESPONSES TO QUESTION DEALING WITH SCHEDULING DAILY CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Responses*	Multiunit Schools			Control Schools			All Multiunit Schools	All Control Schools
	A	B	C	D	E	F		
a	0.0	14.3	3.8	23.5	11.8	23.5	5.1	19.6
b	10.5	0.0	0.0	29.4	17.6	29.4	3.4	25.5
c	5.3	28.6	11.5	47.1	70.6	47.1	13.6	54.9
d	78.9	57.1	53.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	62.7	0.0
e	5.3	0.0	30.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.2	0.0

TABLE 6

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FACULTY RESPONSES TO ALL FIVE QUESTIONS

Responses*	Multiunit Schools			Control Schools			All Multiunit Schools	All Control Schools
	A	B	C	D	E	F		
a	3.2	11.9	3.0	16.7	7.4	11.4	5.1	11.9
b	28.4	20.9	17.7	32.1	56.9	43.1	21.9	43.9
c	11.6	11.9	18.5	29.8	33.3	40.5	14.7	34.4
d	53.6	50.8	50.0	11.9	1.2	2.5	51.4	5.3
e	3.2	4.5	10.8	9.5	1.2	2.5	6.9	4.5

*Legend:

a = Respondent has complete autonomy to make the decision himself.
b = Respondent has final authority to make the decision after receiving suggestions and recommendations from others.
c = Respondent has authority to make the decision within certain limits.
d = Respondent has authority to share the decision with other persons in a group or committee.
e = Respondent has no voice in making the decision (i.e., the decision is made by others).

in the tables, the persons most often mentioned are the other members of one's unit. Furthermore, the characteristic response is to name all the faculty members in the unit. The principal figures much less centrally as a decision maker, advisor, or limit setter. When he is nominated, he is usually not seen as an independent authority figure, but as one of a group of persons involved in making decisions. The unit leader, similarly, is not viewed as a separate decision-making authority. Rather, he is nominated along with other members of the unit as part of the group of decision makers. The district curriculum committee and central-office specialists are nominated much less frequently in the multiunit schools than in the controls. In general, then, the evidence is that the unit faculty has emerged as dominant in the decision-making process.

This concentration of decision-making authority in the unit conforms to the multiunit prototype--i.e., the model of the multiunit school as developed by the Wisconsin R & D Center posits an important role in decision making for unit members.

On the other hand, the prototype also calls for the establishment of an Instructional Improvement Committee, consisting primarily of the principal and the unit leaders, that is assigned authority for coordinating the instructional program of the school. Two of the three multiunit schools we studied had established such committees. In neither case, however, was this committee seen as an important decision-making body. Indeed, of all our respondents only one person (a principal) nominated the Instructional Improvement Committee in answering the questions we have been discussing.

Let us now turn attention briefly to another dimension--the power or influence hierarchy of the school. Just as there have been changes in authority and decision making in the multiunit school, so have there been modifications in the "influence structure" or "power structure." We asked our respondents to complete the following questionnaire item:

> "If you wanted to receive approval from the faculty of your school for an idea you were proposing, it would sometimes be helpful to enlist the support of certain other individuals in your school. Please list below, by name and position, the individuals whose support for your ideas would help most in obtaining faculty approval."

Tabulations of the frequency with which individuals were named give us a picture of the influence hierarchy in each school.

In the control schools the influence hierarchy is dominated by the principal. Typically, he received three to four times as many nominations as any other individual. Nearly all teachers in the school were mentioned once or twice, indicating a lack of consensus on who the influential teachers are in the school. This is, of course, a highly centralized influence structure that revolves around one dominant figure, the principal.

It is to be anticipated that multiunit organization changes this situation. Only one generalization, however, stands for all schools--namely, the unit leaders in all instances emerged as significant persons in the influence hierarchy. In other respects, the changes that occurred varied from school to school. In School A the principal had nineteen nominations. Three unit leaders received eight, one received seven, and one four. No one else had over two nominations. The principal in School C received twenty-one nominations, while his three unit leaders received fourteen, thirteen, and ten. No one else in the school had over three nominations. In both of these schools the principal's influence is obviously shared with the unit leaders. The unit leaders are seen as influential not only by members of their own units, but by some persons in other units as well. Evidence drawn from these two schools reveals that the creation of a new formal position, that of unit leader, has changed the influence structure so that influence is shared by a larger number of persons. At the same time, the principal remains the single most influential person in these schools.

The situation in School B, however, is quite different. Here one unit leader and the librarian in the Instructional Materials Center each obtained six nominations; the other two unit leaders, a teacher, and the principal each had five; and two other teachers received four and three, respectively. This is an example of

dispersed influence in which the traditional dominance of the principal has evaporated.

To generalize on the basis of looking at the three schools, we can see that multiunit organization seemingly insures the development of a more decentralized influence hierarchy than is found in the control schools. The exact form of this decentralized structure, however, does vary from school to school.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have presented findings that reveal a high rate of professional satisfaction in the multiunit school. We have also shown that there have been fundamental changes in the ways decisions are made. Decision making has become centralized in the sense that the authority of the individual teacher or principal to make certain decisions has been decreased. On the other hand, it has been decentralized in that more persons are involved in a wider range of decisions through group participation in decision making.

We have evidence that group participation in decision making is highly regarded by the faculty members of multiunit schools. In interviews, both high-job satisfaction and increased effectiveness were attributed to teacher involvement in the decisions affecting their work. Various pieces of evidence reveal the belief of teachers that their power to affect decisions is substantial.

For example, in our questionnaire we asked respondents: "In general, how much influence do you feel teachers as a group have on how your school is run?" The percentages answering "a great deal of influence" were notably higher in the multiunit schools--40 per cent in School A as compared with 8 per cent in School D, 72 per cent in School B as compared with 11 per cent in School E, and 22 per cent in School C as compared with 11 per cent in School F.

Another question asked how much influence the teachers have on the principal's activities and decisions that affect the performance of the school. Again, more multiunit than control-school teachers claimed a great deal of influence. Still other data reveal an enthusiasm for group decision-making among multiunit faculty members. In a series of questions on teacher preferences concerning a variety of policy-making prerogatives, respondents in multiunit schools were much in favor of the group participation of teachers in the establishment of a variety of policies at the school and district levels.

We conclude, therefore, that the faculty of the multiunit school not only feels a heightened sense of power, but it is enthusiastic about the potentialities of group participation in decision-making processes.

These findings are fully in accord with those of a substantial body of research and theory in social psychology. For many years, certain students of organizational processes have extolled the improvements in morale and work effectiveness that accompany high rates of peer-group interaction and the heavy involvement of people in decisions that bear directly on the work they perform. These writers have contended that when groups actually are given the authority to make and implement decisions that are significant for them, they make these decisions effectively, responsibly, and enthusiastically. Unfortunately, researchers have found few instances in any kind of organization in which there has been a real and comprehensive transfer of authority to the work group. The multiunit school is clearly an example of an organization in which group decision-making has become an accomplished fact. This development augurs well for the future of the multiunit concept. We can expect that with additional experience in the operation of multiunit schools, together with further studies of the organization and functioning of these institutions, it will be possible to increase the effectiveness with which they carry out their responsibilities.